Virginia Cooperative Extension

Ants

ENTOMOLOGY FACT SHEET

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ANTS

Ants are one of the most common household insect pests. Beginning in February or March, carpenter ants may become active inside houses. Later in the spring, the species called "larger and smaller yellow ants" can swarm inside and outside of houses. These ants are frequently confused with termites! Small, black ants often invade houses in the summer looking for sweets. In the fall, yellow ants may swarm again!

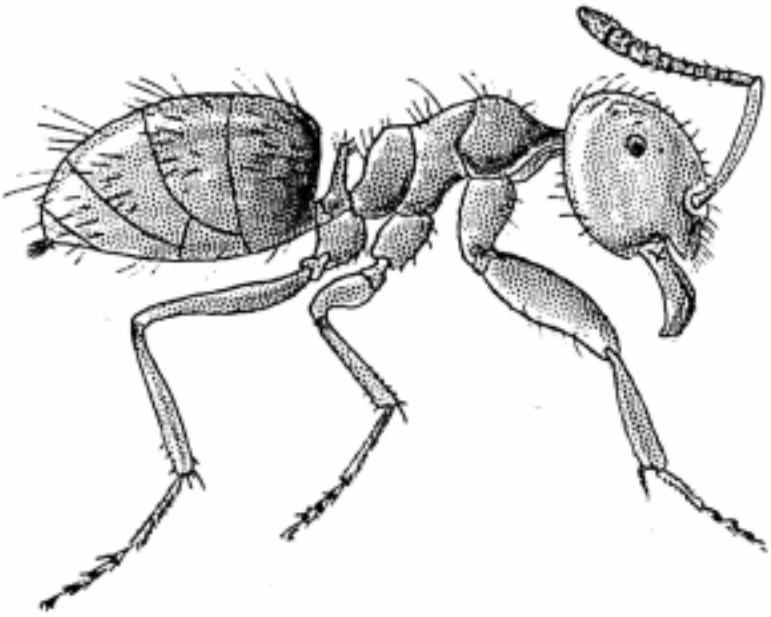
Ants are easily recognized by their three distinct segments and their slender and slightly elbowed antennae. Termites do not have a distinct "waist", and their antennae are not elbowed.

LIFE CYCLE

Yellow ants. These are probably the most commonly reported ant pests around the home. They are small to large ants, light brown in color, and they are found with and without wings. Yellow ants are most often encountered swarming outside the house, usually from under porch and sidewalk slabs. The swarms are common on warm, sunny days in the spring, and the number of ants produced from one nest can be in the thousands. They can also be found swarming inside houses, frequently in the basement in areas where the foundation block meets the wood.

Yellow ants rarely cause anything more than cosmetic damage, and that may be due to their presence. They may build nests close to the foundation walls in houses, and they may construct the nest close to or in the wood (sill plate) on the foundation. The nests close to the sill plate may have some sawdust scattered around the opening. However, yellow ants are not wood-infesting insects.

Controlling yellow ants depends on the location of the nest and the absolute necessity of control. If the nest is close to the house and the ants are causing a nuisance, then a liquid chemical can be applied to the nest opening and soil around the opening. Sometimes the nest is located under the slab and out of reach of insecticides--those colonies will be difficult to eliminate. Apply insecticides as close as possible to the nest opening.



Pharaoh ant. The pharaoh ant is very small (1/8 inch long) and varies from yellow to reddish brown in color. Pharaoh ant "colonies" may be fragmented and widely dispersed throughout a structure. Colonies can contain as many as a half-million workers and thousands of queens (egg-producing females). New colonies can be established with one fertilized queen and just a few workers. Nests may be located outdoors in the lawn or garden, or indoors behind walls (in wall voids), in attics, behind panelling, and in furniture.

Pharaoh ants prefer to nest in warm locations, areas with temperatures between 80 and 86 degrees F; and because of these warm (and dry) nest sites there is a constant

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need for water. Indeed, these ants are frequently found in kitchens, bathrooms, or other rooms with accessible water. Pharaoh ants are capable of feeding on a variety of materials, including sweets (syrups, jellies, cakes, juices) and fatty foods (grease, meats, other insects). In hospitals, these ants have been found in open wounds.

Elimination of pharaoh ant infestations requires the careful application of residual insecticides, and the use of selective baits. Recent work has shown that the most effective baits for pharaoh ants include mint apple jelly, liver, and egg. When these baits are combined with boric acid there can be a significant reduction in pharaoh ant populations. There are commercial baits available that are very effective in controlling this ant species.

CONTROL

NON-CHEMICAL. Control of ants in or around the house must begin with locating the nest. A careful inspection of the areas outside the house might reveal nests or where the ants are gaining access. Disruption of the nests may force the ants to move away from the house.

CHEMICAL. Chemical control of household ant infestations can be accomplished by carefully directing the insecticide spray to the points of entry to the house, such as ground-level doors and windows. Application indoors should be limited to the pests and the areas adjacent to where the ants are located.

For chemical control use one of the following:

carbaryl (Sevin) - outdoor use only

chlorpyrifos (Dursban)

diazinon (Spectracide)

propoxur (Baygon)

aerosols containing pyrethrins or pyrethroids

Follow the specific mixing, application, and disposal directions on the insecticide label. Persons applying insecticides indoors should consider the short-term odor of some of them. The application of insecticides in and around the house should be done carefully, and without contaminating non-target surfaces.

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